

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-3202**

August 6, 2021

Rochelle Walensky, MD, MPH  
Director  
Center for Disease Control and Prevention  
395 E St. SW  
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Director Walensky:

I write today to express my concerns with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) most recent revision of its mask guidance for both vaccinated and unvaccinated Americans. After 15 months of abiding by public health safety guidelines, vaccinated Americans were able to rejoice and to return to some semblance of normalcy. However, the CDC has elicited increasing confusion with its recent reversal, failing to be fully transparent with the data it is using to amend its latest mask guidance.

On June 27, 2021, the CDC issued updated mask guidelines, citing the arrival and spread of the Delta variant across the United States. The new guidelines state that fully vaccinated people who live in places with high or substantial transmission of the virus should once again wear masks in public indoor spaces. Additionally, the CDC now recommends universal indoor masking for all teachers, staff, students, and visitors to schools, regardless of vaccination status.<sup>1</sup>

Following this reversal, the CDC cited a recent outbreak in Barnstable County, Massachusetts – in which nearly 470 confirmed COVID-19 cases were linked to one cluster following festivities over the July 4 weekend – as reason for the sudden reversal.<sup>2</sup> However, the same day, the Kaiser Family Foundation released a report showing that the rate of breakthrough cases, such as those in Barnstable County, is less than one percent among fully vaccinated people in states that keep such data.<sup>3</sup> Given these contradictory studies, it is deeply concerning that the CDC would make such a drastic change of course based on one incident that has a limited sample size.

Furthermore, the concept that children must now wear face coverings while attending school ignores and rejects available scientific data on the issue, given that countless studies have shown that children experience lower infection and transmission rates than adults. For example, a recent study conducted by PLOS Computational Biology found that kids are half as susceptible to COVID-19 compared to adults and that people under the age of 20 are less likely to transmit the virus.<sup>4</sup>

Regardless of which variant we discuss, the one constant is that vaccines have proven to be the most reliable protection against the virus, as over 97 percent of the people hospitalized with COVID-19 are unvaccinated.<sup>5</sup> In order for members of Congress to adequately inform their constituents on what is needed to finally defeat this virus, I request that you respond to the following questions:

1. Outside of the Barnstable County outbreak, what other data did the CDC use to reach its decision to reverse course and reinstitute mask mandates for areas with high or substantial transmission rates?
2. Additionally, what studies and data have the CDC relied on to determine that children must now wear masks while at school?
3. Why did the CDC decide to discontinue monitoring all reported vaccine breakthrough cases back in May?

Sincerely,



Andrew R. Garbarino  
Member of Congress

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.wsj.com/articles/cdc-to-urge-vaccinated-people-to-resume-wearing-masks-in-public-indoor-spaces-11627399286?mod=article\\_inline](https://www.wsj.com/articles/cdc-to-urge-vaccinated-people-to-resume-wearing-masks-in-public-indoor-spaces-11627399286?mod=article_inline)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7031e2.htm?s\\_cid=mm7031e2\\_w](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7031e2.htm?s_cid=mm7031e2_w)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.kff.org/policy-watch/covid-19-vaccine-breakthrough-cases-data-from-the-states/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://journals.plos.org/ploscompbiol/article?id=10.1371/journal.pcbi.1008559>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/30/health/cdc-vaccinated-delta.html>